

John Henry Eaton to Andrew Jackson, March 11, 1820, from Correspondence of Andrew Jackson. Edited by John Spencer Bassett.

JOHN H. EATON TO JACKSON.

Washington, March 11, 1820.

Dear Genl. In my letter a few days ago, I promised that shortly thereafter I would again write you. Your memorial was at that time postponed that gentlemen might have an opportunity to examine and see how far it would prove to them palatable and how far the language might be considered decorous; as you will have perceived by the news papers it was shortly afterwards called up, but interrupted upon the discussion by the *slaves bill* which had been returned to us from the House of Representatives. That being disposed of, the memorial was again adverted to by Mr. King, and after about six or eight speeches, and divers animadversions on the character of the Report of last year; and after the acrimony and severity of your memorial had been discanted upon and defended, it was ordered to be printed.

The advocates and the opposers you will have seen in the *Intelligencer*: amongst the number was Mr Pinkney¹ who advocated the memorial. 4

¹ William Pinkney, senator from Maryland. Jackson's memorial was presented to the Senate by Rufus King, senator from New York, Feb. 23, 1820. On Mar. 3 King called it up again and debate occurred. The memorial was attacked by Walker of Georgia, Burrill of Rhode Island, and Dana of Connecticut. After some discussion these gentlemen withdrew their objections, and six hundred copies were ordered printed. There seems to have been an agreement that the matter would be pressed no further. No reports of the speeches appear in the *Annals of Congress*, where the debate is mentioned (16 Cong., 1 sess., I.

Library of Congress

439, 472). The memorial is in the appendix of the same work 15 Cong., 2 sess., II. 2308 ff.; also in *Senate Docs.*, 16 Cong., 1 sess., vol. I., no. 73. Nothing further was done in the Senate about either the report of Lacock's committee or Jackson's memorial.

He said it was true that it did not, as regarded the committee speak in laudatory phrase, or in suppliant style, nor would such language have been worthy of yourself: that it was a manly argumentative and dignified appeal, and a bold and free examination of an *Indictment* preferred at last session, and was drawn in a style and manner suited to the cause that produced it. He said it was a duty the Senate owed, after what had heretofore transpired, to give under their sanction publicly to the memorial, and by this official act to ward off assault from one whose reputation and character was the property of the nation, and ought to be so considered. It must be to you a matter highly satisfactory, that men so eminently distinguished, and at the same time so competent to judge as King and Pinkney are discovered to be approves of your course and conduct in the Seme. war, men who being almost strangers to you, can feel no other impulse than that which reason sanctions. The opposition to printing was so feebly maintained, and the strength of argument and numbers being on the side of the memorial, that in the end, before the discussion had closed, opposition was withdrawn, and six hundred copies were ordered to be printed; so soon as they are finished I will send you one.

You will remember I stated to you, that Doctr Bronaugh and myself had transcribed and made some changes in the memorial. After this it was handed over to Mr. Pinkney and to Mr. King who desired to see it. They proposed, after having examined it, that some alteration or changes should be made in the first pages; and particularly desired that the sentence which alledged that you had “ *understood* ” the report had not been drawn by any of the Committee should be crossed out, and not printed. They said that any thing the memorial might contain, directly personal would in coming before the public prove injurious, not beneficial to the end, which ought to be the only one intended to be answered, (to wit) the placing the report of the Senate properly before the public. I at first refused, but on a second interview with them on the subject, this was my reply; that

Library of Congress

you would I well knew be satisfied with any freedom or course your friends might deem advisable and if they would state their opinions in writing, to be sent to you, and thereby unite with me in the responsibility I would consent to the alterations proposed. Accordingly they were made; and when you shall see the memorial I am persuaded that in what has been done, there is nothing to which you will object. I will enclose you the writing referred to,² as the basis of what was done, when next I write; it is not at hand or it would be now forwarded. The memorial will I expect be printed in eight or ten days hence.

² This statement, signed by Rufus King, William Pinkney, and John H. Eaton, is as follows: "Having read over the memorial of Genl. Jackson to the Senate of the U. S. for the purpose of justifying himself against the Charges contained in the Report of a Committee of the Senate, made during the last session of Congress, we are of opinion, and accordingly recommend, that the memorial be revised, and that such Clauses thereof be corrected, or expunged, as impute to the Committee, or to the Senate, either partial, prejudiced or illiberal motives. We recommend this Revision not only because the memorial may otherwise be opposed, as wanting in Respect for the Senate; but because with such Corrections, the Facts and Reasons in vindication of the General, which the memorial contains, will be more likely to have their proper Effect."

Those gentlemen and others warmly your friends are opposed to any further examination of this subject. There is no way to reach it but by reference of the whole matter again to a committee, and they say that this ought not to be done—that the Report of last year is duly appreciated every where, and is without any of the effects in relation to you, that you conjecture to have been produced; that the senate never made the report theirs by *adoption*, or did more than to direct, as a matter ordinarily usual, its printing: and that your memorial which is as full and satisfactory as any report that could be made, being also by the senate ordered to be printed, is making the reparation commensurate with the injustice. They say, it is not an answer and defence published by yourself, and therefore a private matter; but a reply presented to the senate, who by the order made for its publication, sanction your opinions, as much as they, by ordering the publication of the

Library of Congress

report, gave *it* sanction; and that, hence, the whole matter stands as tho the senate never had acted on it as the opinions of three men. Added to all this a great majority concur with you, that it is a business with which the senate had, and ought to have had nothing to do, and that a sacrifice of this opinion would be contained, in pressing the enquiry again. Such being the opinions of those whose friendship is unquestionable gives additional weight. Of the good wishes of him who is principal actor in this business the presenter of the memorial you have heretofore had evidence—that of Mr. Pinkney is no less than his

A further objection to the reference is this, that (for you know they are chosen in the Senate by ballot) an unfavourably disposed committee might be selected. It is very easy in a body of 40, for 12 or 15 men acting in concert to appoint a committee of their own: there own ballots would be certain, while the scattering votes of those unapprised of the scheme might effect the purpose: true a similar concert by a majority might defeat it, but then here is the objection; you have presented the memorial, and stirred the investigation, and for your friends under such circumstances to attempt any concert of the kind would afford room for recrimination and censure to you; having a regard for your honor and feelings they could not venture upon such a course; and not to do so, but to trust the matter to those inimically disposed, would be to venture at great hazard, in pursuit of an unprofitable result, and to afford an opportunity for the venting of any lurking spleen. Your memorial having been printed by order of, and bearing with it the sanction, of the Senate, is as full a report as *any Committee* could give however favourably disposed.³

³ Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury from 1795 to 1800, writing from Litchfield, Conn., Apr. 2, 1820, to Jackson Meigs, of Washington, spoke as follows: "I have received your Letter of March 28, with *General Jackson's* reply to the *Committee of the Senate*. It is a valuable Pamphlet; but, I wanted nothing to satisfy my mind, that his conduct has been correct, and his services *preeminently* useful to this Country."

Besides, the opinions entertained by many, that the Senate, have not, and never should have entertained jurisdiction, as you have well argued, would render an attempt to

Library of Congress

recommit the enquiry hazardous; and should it be made and fail of success it might produce an injurious effect upon the whole. therefore, your friends have come to this conclusion, that the "strong spirited and dignified" appeal you have made through the senate, and by them under a feeble opposition ordered to be printed, will effectually put the "Lacock Report" to rest, and ought forever to quiet your feelings upon the subject. My desire to consult and to pursue your own wishes upon this subject would be sufficient to attempt the reference but your friends deeming a different course advisable and proper, renders it prudent to forbear any further attempt; especially too as public opinion is now decidedly with you

The Committee on foreign relations in the Ho. Rep. yesterday made report authorising the President to take possession of E and W Florida. Mr. Forsyth's correspondence in addition to what you have seen was yesterday laid before both houses. His remonstrance as he calls it, to the Spanish Secy. of State was refused and sent back as highly offensive, he informs Mr. Adams that he shall retire from Madrid into France. Doubtless he has left the Spanish Court

Some of our profound politicians have shewn a great knowledge of the situation of the affairs of their Country, and if clothed with sensibility must feel a little mortified. A reference to the Intelligencer of yesterday will shew them debating on the reduction of the army and navy, and urging it as necessary, when lo, on the very next day, out comes a report for active measures of a warlike nature, which points to the necessity of an increase, instead of a diminution.

In the progress of my horse bill for the relief of the Volunteers⁴ it has been urged that they were paid for clothing. There is an old law, during the war which directs volunteers tendering their services for one year, and accepted of by the President to be supplied or paid for clothing; but this law is obsolete, and at any rate applied not to the Seminole volunteers who were to have the same pay etc as had been given to the Militia during

Library of Congress

the war, which was \$6 66/100 under the act of 1795 in view of every thing. Pray did they receive cloathing, and was it by your orders?

4 Bill “for the relief of such officers and volunteers engaged in the late Seminole war as may have lost their horses and other property during said campaign”, introduced by Senator Eaton Dec. 14. It passed the Senate, but was tabled in the House.

The President says he has recvd your letter. He said he wanted to have with me some conversation in relation to it, but it being a levee evening and much crowded no opportunity was then had. He desired me to say to you, that he had been so taken up with the deep agitations here the (missouri bill), that he did not [have] time but that he would shortly write to you. The agitation was indeed great I assure you—dissolution of the Union had become quite a familiar subject. By the compromise however restricting slavery north of 36½ degrees we ended this unpleasant question. Of this the Southern people are complaining, but they ought not, for it has preserved peace dissipated angry feelings, and dispelled appearances which seemed dark and horrible and threat[en]ing to the interest and harmony of the nation. The constitution has not been surrendered by this peace offering, for it only applies while a territory when it is admitted congress have the power and right to legislate, and not when they shall become States

I fear I have tired you so good night. Present me respectfully to mrs Jackson and to my friend Capt Call.5 Yours truly

5 See vol. II., p. 439, note 2.